



The Reverend Margaret Bird Caldwell Phillimore - *Religion and Education*

The long struggle for women's ordination as priests in the American Episcopal Church began in the mid-1850's and ended in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on September 16, 1976, when the General convention of the Episcopal Church voted to approve women's ordination to the priesthood and the episcopate. While this change was not made compulsory on all American bishops, the Diocese of West Virginia did embrace the canon law and, in January of 1977, history was made in the Episcopal Church.

Margaret Bird Caldwell Phillimore was one of the first women in West Virginia to be ordained Priest in the Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia at that time. Reverend Phillimore's road to the priesthood was an interesting one.

She was born December 21, 1915, in Wheeling, West Virginia, the daughter of the late Gibson Lamb Caldwell and Eleanor Glass Caldwell.

She attended Miss Bertha's School, Triadelphia High School, Pine Manor and Dana Hall. Margaret received her bachelor's degree from Smith College in 1947. She then attended Katherine Gibbs School in New York and, later, worked as a secretary until becoming a full-time volunteer for Moral Re-Armament from 1939 until 1961.

It was during this time that she met her future husband, the Hon. Miles G. W. Phillimore. Prior to her ministry and with her husband, she served in social work on every continent. She and her husband had one daughter, Debbie.

She was widowed in 1972. She returned to college and earned a second bachelor's degree from Wheeling Jesuit University (formerly Wheeling College) in 1974. She then attended seminary in Queen's Theological College in Birmingham, England, in 1975, and studied for the priesthood.

After her ordination, she worked as an interim vicar or rector in several churches in six of the eight deaneries of the Diocese of West Virginia. Usually there was some longstanding area of difficulty that needed to be resolved prior to the new incumbency of a permanent rector. The Reverend Phillimore was sent to that church to resolve it.

For several years, she worked with the Movement for the Ordination of Women in England. She preached in seventeen English churches and eight English Cathedrals. She was the first woman ever to preach at the Cathedrals of Canterbury, Rochester, and Carlisle.

She served on eight boards and commissions in the Diocese of West Virginia. She chaired the Diocesan Division of Christian Education and served on the Hunger Task Force, the Appalachian People's Service Organization, and was a visiting minister for the West Virginia Penitentiary in Moundsville, West Virginia. In her earlier years, she became the first manager of the Wheeling Symphony.

Margaret Phillimore was a woman of courage, a visionary, and a woman of principle. She pursued a dream that possibly had no chance of coming true but she never gave up. She was in her sixties when that dream came true. Her faith guided her lifetime of service to God, family, and mankind.

After retirement, she moved to Seattle, Washington to be near her only daughter and granddaughters. She died March 15, 2004.